




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 8 August 2017

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL:
HEALTH, COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND DOMESTIC AND
FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (9.46 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee's report on budget estimates 2017-18. This year's estimates showed the child safety crisis has gone from bad to worse under the Palaszczuk Labor government and this Minister for Child Safety. It showed that Queensland children remain at risk, the system is continuing to fail them and carers are still not being supported.

Queenslanders saw in this year's estimates proceedings confirmation that this is an out-of-touch, secretive, do-nothing minister who is not across her brief. We saw that both the minister and her director-general were not equipped to answer crucial questions about whether our children are being protected and whether important sources of funding are being maintained. Queenslanders could be forgiven for thinking that the director-general's comments during the hearing were at best inflammatory and at worst blatantly political. We rightfully expect senior public servants in this state to be apolitical and leave the politicking to their ministers, but what we saw time and time again as the director-general attempted to answer the committee's questions was a political blame game. I have never in my eight years in this place seen such a flurry of Post-it notes and briefing notes flying everywhere—not from a director-general, but to a director-general. It was quite extraordinary.

Whilst the majority of the committee's crucial questions were avoided by the minister and her director-general, this did not stop them from disgracefully spending their time talking about budgets from half a decade ago. Rather than talking about the very real child safety crisis affecting real children in Queensland right now—today—we saw the minister attempt to drag up and rehash the past in a desperate attempt to distract from her own shambolic performance. This is not good enough for the kids with broken hearts who are still waiting helplessly for Child Safety to come knocking. It is not good enough for the carers who are leaving the system because they feel so let down they are giving up their important work.

Of great concern are the director-general's worrying comments about the child related cost budget. The CRC budget is specifically designed for children in out-of-home care and for children residing at home. It is designed to enhance a child's safety and wellbeing and minimise the need for more intrusive child protection intervention. They are cost specific to a child's needs as recorded in the approved case plan and are in excess of financial support provided by routine allowances, but we are seeing funding being ripped out of the child related cost budget to fund the minister's new mandatory drug testing. The CRC budget already experiences overspends. We also saw that question on notice 11 remains unanswered.

Almost a month into the new financial year, the budget allocated for each child safety service centre has not been finalised. This is beyond belief, is completely unacceptable and reeks of a cover-up of potential budget cuts in some areas. We know that some child safety service centres are being

stretched to the limit, and Queenslanders deserve to know which service centres are experiencing cuts under Labor. Finally, we saw no evidence of a plan to reduce the overreliance on residential care in Queensland. This is a service which now costs more than \$200 million per annum, at an average cost of \$300,000 per child.

Meanwhile, in domestic and family violence prevention we saw a measly two per cent increase in funding in areas like the south-east region on the Gold Coast, despite the double-digit increase in domestic violence incidents. That is not good enough as we continue to see women, children and men leaving domestic violence with nowhere to go. We see them put up in unsafe motels, at a seven-figure cost to the state, where they remain at risk and usually end up with no choice but to return home, where retribution will always follow.

Queenslanders with a disability will be rightfully appalled by this year's estimates. Questions were raised about poor record keeping by Disability Services Queensland after a number of client files were rejected by the NDIA. The minister could not say if clients who had incorrect contact information were still being given support. When it comes to forensic disability services located at Wacol, a number of crucial questions could not be answered at the estimates hearing about the service's operation.

We know that there are still more than 18,000 people with a disability who are languishing on the register of need. Under the Palaszczuk Labor government there is no plan to support them whilst they wait for the NDIS to roll out in the remaining parts of Queensland.

I would like to thank the non-government members of the committee—the members for Caloundra, Cleveland and Gaven—for their hard work in holding this government to account during the estimates this year. I do thank the chair, the member for Nudgee, for doing her best to protect her incompetent Minister for Child Safety. Queenslanders deserve better than what they saw in this year's estimates. They deserve a government that will build stronger families—

Mr WHITING: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Certainly that is unparliamentary language and I ask you to advise the member to change her language.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Farmer): Order! There is no point of order.

Ms BATES: Only a Tim Nicholls led LNP government will build a better Queensland.